



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.

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**Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee
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SB 24 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, I am Richard Murray, First Vice President of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education and a member of the Killingly Board of Education. We appreciate the opportunity to address you on those aspects of the Governor's budget proposals which impact elementary and secondary education. In general, CABE is supportive of the budget proposal which, despite challenging in economic times, provides for the first increase in the Education Cost Sharing grant in 5 years. We are concerned however, that in "non conditional" districts ECS aid is added to the board of education budget only at the discretion of the municipality. This significantly weakens the intended impact of providing resources to better support our public schools. Given the multitude of new requirements which are included in the Governor's reform package, including implementation of an extensive teacher and administrator evaluation and support system, it is imperative that districts receive these education dollars.

CABE is very supportive of the proposal to fund an additional 500 children in school readiness programs. It is clear that access to quality preschool programs is a critical component of closing the achievement gap. We must recognize that 500 new slots is a small piece of the total need, and we urge you to make a multiyear commitment to reach the goal of access to a quality early childhood program for all needy students.

CABE opposes the requirement that public schools fund \$1,000 per pupil for those students who attend charter schools. Charter schools are authorized and approved by the state, and the funding for them should remain a state responsibility. It is important that we continue to honor the choices made by those students and families who elect to remain in a traditional public school setting. Diverting education dollars to charter schools will result in a reduction in programs for those students who have made a different choice.

While we respect the comments recently made by Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management Ben Barnes that this budget proposal was unable to accommodate an increase in funding for the special education excess cost grant, we must point out that the cap on this critical grant imposes a significant burden on school districts and forces them to make additional cuts in regular education programs to accommodate the rising special education costs and the lack of funding increases from the state and federal government. We urge you to remove the cap as quickly as possible.

CABE strongly opposes the proposal to reduce the Education Cost Sharing grant for Connecticut school districts with 1000 students or less whose per pupil expenditure exceeds the statewide average. There are a multitude of reasons that districts – regardless of size – have expenditures that exceed the statewide average. When we look at the districts with 1000 students or less, we see average per pupil expenditures that range from \$10,870 to \$19,546. Many of the districts in this category fall well below the state average in 2008-09 of \$13,607. Rather than establish an arbitrary penalty, where the data does not show that the size of district bears a relationship to per pupil expenditure, we would support incentives for school districts to explore collaboration or consolidation, if that is in the best educational interests of their students. Particularly at a time where we talk about more personalization of learning, that is something that is a strength of small school districts.

We appreciate your attention to these issues.